

Record of Meeting, Newark Branch NAACP Executive Board
 Special Meeting, June 9, at 8:00 p.m.
 St. Philip's Parish House, Newark, N.J.

The meeting was called together at 8:30 p.m., Mr. Boyd B. Cantrell, branch President presiding.

Mr. Cantrell said he had called the meeting in response to a suggestion by board member Mr. Stanley Winters. He then asked the secretary to read from the May 30, 1964 issue of the New Jersey Afro American. The secretary read a "Letter to the editor" appearing over Mr. Winters signature and an editorial note appended by the editor of the Afro. Correspondence between Mr. Winters and Mr. Cantrell was next read.

At this point, Mr. Winters got up and claimed that the proceedings were illegal and that the relevancy of the material read to the branch had not been established. Mr. Cantrell rejected these claims. Mr. Winters said he had not requested that this special meeting be held. He pointed out that the secretary had not read his original letter but a copy, and that there were slight differences. He demanded that the original letter received by Mr. Cantrell be read.

The original letter was read. Mr. Winters pointed out that it said "I would therefore assume" not "I would therefore request" that a special meeting be called, and that this meeting had not been called at his suggestion, but at the president's.

Mr. Cantrell then stated the purpose of the meeting: "To ask Mr. Winters whether he is the Lee Johnson whose column has been appearing in the New Jersey Afro American. Miss Sally Carroll, branch assistant secretary: "This Lee Johnson is not fit to be a board member. Everything I've heard indicates that Mr. Winters is Lee Johnson. Everything he's done would render him useless as a board member. Here is what he said in a column in the Afro American in 1963 (reads one sentence from a clipping, the sense of which was that the branch should be boycotted until its leadership changed its policies)." Afro, May 25, 1963.

Mr. Clyde Mitchell: "What clarification do you have that this column is written by Mr. Winters as Lee Johnson? Is there any other substantial proof?" Mr. Cantrell: "The dispute between the Afro and Mr. Winters is their business. I am only interested in knowing whether he is Lee Johnson. If he is, we should know that. I'm waiting to hear from Mr. Winters. That's the first order of business. I have read the letter Mr. Winters requested that I read."

Various protests were now heard from board members. Calls of let others have a chance to speak. "This isn't fair." Mr. Cantrell: "I will hear no one until Mr. Winters has given his answer." Mr. Payne: "You've heard from Sally Carroll and Clyde Mitchell, why not from others?" Mr. Theodore Pinkney and Mr. Andrew Washington also object.

Mr. Cantrell recognizes Miss Lorrie Stalks: Mrs. Stalks moves "That anyone who fails to respond to the directions of the chair be dismissed from the meeting." Motion seconded. No questions, no discussion, vote called, some "a yes" - no "nays" or abstentions asked for.

Mr. L. J. Thomas requests to be heard. Shouting from chair and from Mr. Thomas. Mr. Cantrell asks Mr. Winters to speak: "I would first ask the chair to correct its statement that I requested that the letters between Mr. Cantrell and me be read. The record should show that the letters were read by the secretary at the president's request, and that I only asked that the correct copy be read, not an incorrect one." Mr. Cantrell refuses to correct anything. He says, "I'm only trying to be fair. Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to let board members speak and then we'll ask Mr. Winters again."

Miss Carroll: "The question here goes deeper than freedom of the press. Has the trust of the branch been abused by a board member? The statements by this Lee Johnson have shaken the confidence of many people in the branch. For a member to write under an assumed name and use derogatory remarks is terrible. He should not stab us in the back under an assumed name. Let him make any criticisms right here in the Branch where they belong."

Mr. John D. Woods: "We are only interested in knowing whether Mr. Winters is or is not Lee Johnson. The only question is whether a member of the board wrote these things. If these allegations are true, then he should not be a member. The First Amendment and freedom of the press don't concern us." Mr. William D. Payne: "There are no charges tonight. This is a serious matter of principle. You or anybody could be slandered in a proceeding such as this. We are taking this as a bare fact, yet there's no proof. What purpose would be served by having Mr. Winters answer? What would we do?" Mr. Woods: "We would vote him out." Are we at the proper stage for anything? No where in the NAACP Constitution is

there provision for a procedure like this."

Mr. Woods: "It seems that the purpose of this meeting is to see whether Mr. Winters had conducted himself contrary to the executive board. Others on the board who support him should be expelled also."

Mr. Andrew Washington: "I too have occasionally had the information to send articles to the press about educational matters. I can visualize myself called before a full court to account for myself. The First Amendment is relevant here. If toes are sometimes stepped on, there is a regular procedure to follow." Mr. Winters has been tried, judged, and found guilty here, by Mr. Woods." Mr. Cantrell: "Don't call no names." Mr. Washington retracts his mentioning of Mr. Woods. Mr. Washington goes on: "I get the feeling that the only people welcome at the Branch are those who agree with the status quo. We are not really operating as a democratic organization. It may be Mr. Winters today and Mr. Washington tomorrow, someone else next week. There are so many vital civil rights issues that we could take up. There's not even an attorney here to straighten us out. Some of the ideas expressed here are unworthy, others may be noble, but let's not take a rash action."

Mr. Woods: "Is he or is he not Lee Johnson? I'm just trying to find out. I'm wondering who did write those columns. Whoever did should not belong to this branch." Miss Carroll: "No one is afraid of honest criticism, honestly given. But not criticism under a false name."

Mr. Mitchell: "Are these excerpts being recorded?" Mr. Cantrell: "Miss Carroll is taking them down."

Mr. Lee Davis: "In a court of law a man is innocent until proven guilty. But this isn't a court of law. This person has been asked several times. Is he guilty or not? I want to hear this person make a statement in all fairness to the board."

Mr. Payne: "Let's hold up a moment. Suppose someone says, 'Miss Virginia Myers [branch secretary] is a murderer. He comes here and said he heard that and we ask Miss Myers, 'Answer yes or no.' Suppose there was a suit on; she'd be foolish to answer. She with Mr. Winters. Suppose he had a suit against the Afro. He'd be foolish to give a statement outside of court.'" Mr. Lee Davis: "I can't understand why someone is here to speak for Mr. Winters when he is here to speak for himself."

Mr. Mitchell: "I've listened to Mr. Cantrell ask Mr. Winters 12-15 times to take the floor. This is not a courtroom, it's a social meeting. Mr. Winters doesn't have to make any statement if he doesn't want to. The issue is what action we are to take if he doesn't vindicate himself. All of us can talk, but until he says something we have nothing to go on."

Mr. Pinckney: "I'm not speaking for Mr. Winters, I'm speaking for myself. Since when is it charged a crime for a man to write under an assumed name? Who was Plato? Some one who used that name. Shakespeare may really have been an assumed name. Mark Twain was a nom de plume. There are many such cases. There has been no attempt to show that all the articles in this column were written by one person. There has been a statement taken out of context. A boycott could be based on anything. Suppose someone said, 'Unless Bill Payne resigns from the executive board, we'll boycott the branch.' So what? What was the purpose of the proposed boycott? To undermine public confidence as alleged. Maybe it was to rebuild and strengthen the organization. I've been critical of the branch inside and outside of meetings. Does that mean that one can say anything about the Branch anymore outside of a meeting? Human integrity itself is at stake. We have not shown that the articles were written by Mr. Winters." Mr. Woods: "We're not concerned with that, only to answer the question." If this case goes through, then no matter what anyone says about the Branch, you could be charged with malting it."

Mrs. Rita Norris: "This whole thing is an insult to our intelligence. Let's take action right now. No more filibustering."

Mr. Cantrell: "We've heard everyone. Now it's in the hands of the board." Mr. L. J. Thomas tries to speak: "I'm sick of this jazz. I'm a board member and I've been denied the right to speak. Ain't I a board member?" Mr. Cantrell: "Miss Myers, is Mr. Thomas a board member?" Miss Myers: "No, not according to the attendance records."

Mr. Thomas: "Now hold up a minute. Didn't I write to you that I was going on nights in order to handle the Tucker case? Didn't you get a letter from me? Read that letter. Something fishy is going on. Ed Slater sent in a membership and a check and it was mailed back to him."

Mr. Cantrell: "You can't tell me that a board member has worked for 5 months and couldn't come to a single meeting." Mr. Thomas: "If I'm not a board member, why did I get a notice to this meeting?" Mr. Payne: "I'm surprised at you, Reverend. There has been no action at any meeting on Mr. Thomas' case. Give him a chance to speak."

Mrs. Starks: "I move that Bill Payne be ejected from the meeting. We're not going anywhere, we're going to have a meeting." Mr. Washington

-3

asks to speak on a point of personal privilege. Denied. Mr. Winters asks for the floor to make a statement: "I'm very much upset that an organization devoted to making the US Constitution a reality in Mississippi should be trampling on it here in New Jersey. First, Mr. Cantrell in his letter to me said he was upset by a letter I wrote to the press about the NAACP. What was about the NAACP there? Nothing has been proven. Is it a crime to write letters to the press? Second, there is a personal vendetta here aimed at getting me off the board. I have been a good board member. I've attended most board meetings. No one can say I've never been critical in Board meetings. I've taken part in Branch activities, maybe not on some as much as other people, but more on other activities than some people. There have been no charges, no presentation of proof, no establishment that what is going on is relevant to the branch. A copy of the Afro has been read, in one sentence or maybe part of a sentence. There have been many such columns, I haven't read them all. Many were not even about the Branch. So what? There is a presumption of guilt until innocence is proven. Yet 'guilt' has not been defined, no any evidence brought forward. Suppose I did anger and said, 'No, I am not Lee Johnson.' It's my word against the editor's. Who will you believe? Will any more responsible procedure be followed than here? Suppose I answer 'yes,' so what? What someone does as part of freedom of the press is not this branch's business. Suppose I entered a libel action against this newspaper. Why should I say anything here that might prejudice myself? If the editor spoke the truth in his note, then he has betrayed a newspaperman's confidence and is unworthy of any trust. If he spoke a lie, he is equally unworthy. I submit that this whole proceeding is none of the branch's business."

Miss Evers: "Inasmuch as Mr. Winters won't admit or deny that he is Lee Johnson, I move that he be suspended by the Branch." Protests from the floor. Mr. Thomas says, "You can't do that, it's not in the Constitution." Mr. Cantrell agrees. Mr. Mitchell: "If Mr. Thomas received a card to this meeting he should be heard. There are intangibles, there are certain kinds of people here. We have to hear him."

Mr. Payne: "I apologize for my show of temper. Whatever we decide to-night should remain confidential in the board. If we should take an action, we may have no concrete things to go on and may all wind up in a court of law." Mr. Cantrell agrees there should be no statement to the press.

Mr. Woods: "There's a trust to be being a board member. I have nothing against Mr. Winters. But we want to know the truth. I consider this an affront to this group, to every member of the board." He moves "that a committee be appointed to study this situation and come to a conclusion about what action should be taken" Mr. Mitchell seconds. The motion is defeated.

Mr. Stalks: "We've heard the facts. Mr. Erwin is here. Perhaps he can shed some light if he would care to." Mr. Martin Erwin: "I think I'm going to abstain from here on. Inasmuch as I work for the Afro American and am a board member, I'd rather not speak here." Mr. Stalks: "Why is it always the NAACP which is knifed in the back. We hear nothing about B'Mai B'Rith, Brian Baru, the Knights of Columbus. We're not talking about Plato tonight. We don't need anyone to sit in at our meetings who is going to knife us in the back. We're in a 100-year struggle for civil rights. If someone is guilty, let's at least have the deed done where we can walk away with our heads held high and say it was not an NAACP person who was trying to destroy the NAACP. Let's take some action. We don't want this spread out in the paper if we can help it." A motion is made, seconded, and swiftly passed, with no discussion or questions, no opposition votes recorded, "That we decide the matter here and now."

Miss Carroll: "I now move that we give a vote of no confidence in Mr. Winters and ask that he resign as a Board member." Seconded. Mr. Cantrell: "There will be no discussion, everyone has had a chance to speak." Mr. Payne rises: "This is highly irregular, there is no legal counsel here --" Mr. Cantrell: "Why are you doing this to me? You've had your chance." Mr. Woods: "Mr. Winters has been asked over and over again to state his position emphatically. We should take every step to protect the image of the NAACP. Since he won't make a statement, it's reasonable for me to conclude that he is guilty." Miss Carroll: "Ask everyone to stand and vote. Why don't we get moving?"

The vote is taken. Twelve stand in favor. Seven stand opposed. Mr. Cantrell doesn't vote. Four abstain. Mr. Untrell: "I want those who abstained to tell us why." Mr. Earl Harris: "I abstained because I've served on juries in Essex County. I know that no person can be found guilty until it's proven to the jury's satisfaction. There has been no proof shown here from either side." Mr. Stalks: "How about Clyde Mitchell, he abstained too." Mr. Mitchell: "Don't finger me. There were others who abstained also. How about them?" Mr. Cantrell:

"Clyde, I'm asking you to tell us why you abstained." Mr. Mitchell: "I think we should get the facts before we take action to prove the validity of what we're doing." Mr. Cantrell: "Everyone had a chance to speak." Mr. Thomas: "You didn't give me a chance."

Mr. Cantrell: "We're ready to adjourn." Someone moves that a copy of the motion of no confidence in Mr. Winters be sent to the National Office of the NAACP. Seconded. Mr. Pinckney: "Why not send a copy to the Afro in Baltimore? Before the Board took any action you did that. Yet you've always said that branch matters should be kept out of the press."

Mr. Cantrell: "I sent that letter as an individual letter, not in behalf of the branch." Mr. Pinckney: "Mr. Winters's letter to the Afro was also sent as an individual letter yet you got all excited about it and brought it to the branch. You informed the press about an impending action without the board having anything to do with it. That was an improper action."

A motion to adjourn was carried. Shouts by various people and Mr. Cantrell, "Don't tell Doug Eldridge. [Newark News reporter]. He's eating outside. Remember." Mr. Winters: "How about all reporters, not only Mr. Eldridge?" Mr. Cantrell: "All reporters. No one is to make a statement until I get one ready and decide."

Respectfully submitted as a true copy of notes taken at the meeting and reproduced to the best of my recollection, after consultation with others who were present:

Stanley B. Winters

Stanley B. Winters
Member, Executive Board
Newark Branch NAACP,
and Chairman of the
Community Coordination
Committee

June 10, 1964

Present at meeting

Boyd B. Cantrell

Lary Worthy

Lannie Stalks

Ida V. Myers

Sally G. Carroll

Cleo Blaht

Zion Clement

Rev. R. W. Coleman

Pansy Dantzler

Lee G. Davis

Martin Ervin

Rev. Earl U. Frazier

Earl Harris

Clyde Mitchell

Sue Nelson

Rita Norris

William D. Payne

Theodore Pinckney

L. J. Thomas

Andrew Washington

Louise Washington

Stanley B. Winters

John D. Woods

Lester Wooten maybe 1-2 others.

(Exact attendance sheet in hand
of Newark Branch)

Agenda: At several points in the meeting Mr. Payne, Mr. Winters, and other speakers called the chair's attention to the fact that the post card notice of the meeting had not stated the business of the special meeting. Mr. Cantrell replied that this was unnecessary because at the last regular board meeting he had announced that there would be a special meeting held to take up tonight's business.